

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ARTS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION FROM NATIONAL THEATRE OF SCOTLAND

Introduction

The National Theatre of Scotland welcomes the Arts Funding Inquiry, particularly in the light of the development of a culture strategy for Scotland. We applaud the significant ambition of the draft culture strategy and see this inquiry as playing an important role in ensuring that that ambition will be able to be realised. National Theatre of Scotland believes that the right of all citizens to cultural provision and expression in their communities can and should be enshrined in this document. We believe that it would be helpful to explicitly note that this right is true regardless of age, gender, physical ability, social class, ethnic or cultural origin, sexuality or location. There has never been a more important time for Scotland to be confident and outward looking in its cultural expression and targeted funding at a sustainable level makes this possible.

What are the major threats to sustainable funding of the arts in Scotland?

As the creation of the Inquiry implies there are significant threats to the sustainability of the arts in Scotland and we welcome the attempt to address this issue before it is too late. We applaud the Cabinet Secretary's efforts to ensure that the reduction in income to the arts from National Lotteries was compensated for by the Scottish Government. Despite this the reality for many arts organisations and independent artists is that funding has been going backwards in real terms for some time. The National Theatre of Scotland is in the privileged position of enjoying both an extremely positive relationship with government and also strong levels of financial support. Even given this, funding for the company has reduced by 21% since 2012 in real terms when actual reduction and inflation are taken into account. This comes at a time when costs have continued to rise, affecting our ability to make the sort of cultural provision we believe the Scottish people deserve. The arts in Scotland are a complex and interdependent ecology, changes in one area almost inevitably impact others.

We see Brexit and the potential macro-economic downturn as a result of it as being a significant threat to government finances in general and the arts by extension. The reduction in and in some cases complete removal of local authority funding has been detrimental to arts organisations and individual artists and arts workers. We would contend that this has also been detrimental to local authorities who have lost the benefits that art brings to local communities. When coupled with the potential removal of access to European Commission funding and variable changes such as a reduction in National Lottery spending and the position of arts funding is increasingly precarious.

What are the main challenges for artists and cultural freelancers in obtaining funding in Scotland?

Artists and cultural freelancers are facing an increasingly crowded market when competing for funds from Creative Scotland. Simultaneously they are finding that the funds allocated to funding rounds in which they are eligible to apply are reducing. When coupled with the reduction in cultural investment from local authorities, and diminished or depleted funds through private Trusts and Foundations, the picture becomes quite dire. For many this means assessing whether it is viable to continue their practise in Scotland. Most artist and cultural freelancers in Scotland work both individually and for funded organisations, a reduction in their numbers would have a significant impact across the entire cultural landscape. It is vital that both organisations and individuals are able to access funding, neither group can exist without the other.

What measures could the Scottish Government take to ensure a sustainable level of funding for the arts?

The key to attracting greater funding for the arts in Scotland is to ensure that the arts are seen as vital to Scotland's identity as a nation and its economic viability, in short as an intrinsic part of life in Scotland. There have been positive steps in this direction with the draft cultural policy as well as the way Scotland represents itself internationally but vigilance is required in the face of ever increasing calls on the public purse. One way to embed this thinking is to promote partnerships between arts organisations and other departments including health, education, housing and environment including having artists in residence in departments and service providers.

It is also crucial that funding levels are indexed to inflation. Further to this it is vital that funding bodies consider the implications of funding projects at less than the amount applied for. Currently this can lead to artists working for less than industry standard rates which are already relatively low.

How could Scotland be innovative in attracting greater funding for the arts?

National Theatre of Scotland supports the investigation and development of new funding models but notes that this should not be at the expense of existing infrastructure such as the principle of arms-length funding or policy levers such as Theatre Tax Relief (should this power become devolved). A strong and supportive system of funding, from micro grants to multi-year agreements is at the core of a cultural industry that is able to develop and plan for success while also nurturing emerging generations of artists and arts workers. This should be viewed holistically, and include national government and local authority funding as well as the income organisations and individuals are already attracting from donors, trust and foundations, sponsorship and commercial ventures.

In addition to this we support the creation of investment schemes, either through the Scottish National Investment Bank or another government body which would invest in projects with the potential to repay this investment once they become profitable. There is a history of this working in publishing, film and music but it could also be applicable to performing arts projects coming from the not for profit sector with commercial potential (including outwith Scotland). An investment fund of this nature would need to come with business support and could follow models used for social ventures.

Initiatives such as a transient visitor tax and requiring property developers to invest in local arts projects as part of their approvals can also be effective. It is also vital that Scotland retains the ability to participate in European Commission funded projects as a third country.

Finally, the Arts Council England requirement for data sharing means that England has rich audience data that is used by individual companies but can also be utilised by government to track impact and identify gaps. We welcome the decision to appoint the Audience Agency to fulfil this role for Scotland and hope that it leads to a similar level of information sharing between organisations.

How should public money be made available to support artists and cultural freelancers in Scotland, including any relevant international examples of best practice?

It is important that there is support for artists and cultural freelancers in varying and flexible ways and at both a national and local level. This is particularly pertinent given the erosion of local authority arts support in some areas of the country leading to inequality of provision.

Two international examples worthy of consideration are;

- The French 'Intermittents du Spectacle' system whereby artists who can prove that they regularly earn an income through their practise can claim state support in fallow periods is worthy of consideration in the light of low average wages of Scottish artists and freelance arts workers. To take this further a benefit system for Scotland (not just for arts workers) that would allow people to easily dip in and out of income support allows people to remain in the industry. This system is also essential if, as a government and nation, we want to reduce employment and diversify our workforce to include those with disabilities, caring responsibilities, socio-economic deprivation and so on, as our gig economy currently makes it impossible for people who require benefits to gain experience in an industry that is by and large made up of freelance workers.
- Aotearoa New Zealand is currently in the process of including cultural well-being as a core component of their new Living Standards Framework. This rightly centres culture at the heart of the national conversation and ensures that government policy more broadly considers the arts. This can lead to greater integration between arts and healthcare or education provision, something that is happening in some ways in Scotland but could be enhanced.

What factors should be considered and how should decisions be made about which artists or cultural freelancers should obtain public funding in Scotland?

Maintaining arms-length non-political specialist expertise to develop cultural policy and funding models is crucial to ensure that artists are supported

appropriately. There is a need for transparency on strategic prioritisation and decision making, with many more people 'in the room', by whatever means, genuinely feeding into those principles.

A grading system whereby more emergent artists apply for smaller capped grants, and more established companies apply for great sums could be considered. Separate streams for creating new work and for redevelopment or remounting work could also be of benefit as we are currently a very disposable ecology whereby much work is only seen once.

As part of this it is vital that the audience itself is considered. Artists should be funded so that they can price their work at a level that is accessible to all. This must include cultural provision in schools for young people so that they are able to access the arts independently in later life.